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FURNACES AND FIRES.

ONE of the best things London *Punch* was ever guilty of publishing represented a small girl in the store of a retail coal seller whom she asked the price for "alf a 'undred of coal," and the coal seller replies, "Well, my dear, you know coals is coals." "Mother 'll be glad to 'ear it," answers the girl, "for the last she 'ad of you was slate."

Aside from this peculiarity which often attends coal ordered from our city yards, there is a variety of kinds bearing a diversity of fanciful names, made up of coal of two entirely different characteristics.

There is no fuel which makes so cheerful a fire as the bituminous coal. It is all the better for an occasional stir, and it responds by brilliant flames fanciful and suggestive. The anthracite on the other hand is hard and bright and clean in appearance, burns with a steady persistency which seldom enthruses into a flame, and which is not liable to go out. It is more easily regulated than the bituminous, and is readily kept over night.

A wood fire is bright and inviting, and coke is occasionally used. This latter is difficult to ignite, but when thoroughly ablaze remains so for a long time without attention. A peculiar fuel is used in Ireland, and consists of coal dust ground into the clay by constant walking over it, after which it is made into balls and laid upon the fire. It is said to throw out a powerful heat.

The vehicles for holding this fire and permitting the warmth to be distributed are grates, furnaces, and stoves, all possessing their own peculiarities and their individual advantages. For heating a house entire, probably the system prevailing in this country of having a furnace in the cellar, connecting with the several rooms by means of flues and registers, is the simplest and most complete. The singular characteristic of the furnace which prompts it to use all its strength on warm days to the entire exclusion of warmth on cold occasions, is a contrivance very much after the nature of human kind.

In the larger cities and towns few houses now erected for private habitation, or even the modern flat, is complete without a hot air furnace, while steam also has been utilized for house warming, generally in the larger structures where a furnace is insufficient for the need. These hot air furnaces save considerable space in doing away with the stove, as also trouble in narrowing down the number of fires to be looked after and confining the ashes and dust to the basement, where they can be easily taken care of. Nor is there so large difference in the cost, for putting in an ordinary furnace varies from \$100 to \$250, according to the number of rooms heated, and we have lately seen a new steam boiler for heating anywhere from three to fifteen rooms, and its price approaches very closely the figures for the furnace.

Notwithstanding all the other appliances in use and in favor, the stove probably retains the lead. The styles of the present day vary as much from the styles of ten years ago as in almost any line of household furniture. Not long ago there was introduced the base-burner or monitor-shaped apparatus, which at once became very popular and for a time filled the demand for a more consistent companion to fine furniture and rich surroundings.

In the newest article presented this year, a great change is seen. The clumsy and inartistic affair has disappeared, and in place of the tall lighthouse that formerly asserted itself in the drawing-room, we find a new creation not unworthy of a place amid elaborate surroundings.

A stove of this sort recently attracted us; it is octagonal or square-shaped, stands quite low, and, besides being capable of easy feeding, does not obstruct the mantel ornaments. Cast iron and polished steel are used throughout, while a set of panels, a few inches from the top, ornamented with art tiles or art castings give it a decorative appearance. Such an article is an excusable addition to any room where other means of heating are out of the question.

As an aid to ventilation and for general cheerfulness, the grate is unequalled and must always be popular. Yet how many can properly light a fire? The paper is often damp, the wood usually so; the simple measure of placing the bundles of wood upon the shelf, above the range, to dry, is not so often adopted as it might be. This drying,

aside from the aid it certainly is in kindling, may also be considered an economy, for it makes the wood ignite more readily and less of it is required.

In visiting the warerooms of the stove trade we noted several reproductions of the open grate heaters so popular some years ago. They also partake of a touch of art, and are not wanting for purchasers. An unobstructed view of the fire is obtained, which, combined with the pleasing outlines of shape, is found to be a favorable point in its sale.

The many other forms of heating stoves are still to be seen on exhibition, and always find purchasers among those who are unable to keep up with the price or style of the "latest" productions. Dealers report a tendency to the better articles, and say that people who would not pay over fifteen dollars for a parlor stove, five or ten years ago, will now readily expend twenty-five or thirty dollars. The price on a good article varies from fifteen to fifty dollars, the average being about twenty-five dollars. The ordinary life of such stoves is from ten to twelve or fifteen years, according to usage, during which time repairs are more or less necessary. When replacing an old stove with a new one, the dealer is generally required to allow for the discarded article. The sum allowed varies from one dollar to ten, according to condition, and a ready market is always found for these second-hand articles among people of limited means.

The stove manufacturer and dealer has just completed his busiest season. October is the leading month of the year. The fall trade usually commences about the middle of September and continues until the first of January, and during this interim three-fourths of the whole year's business is usually transacted. After February it is a rare thing to sell a parlor stove, and the business is confined to the cooking apparatus and furnaces.

The competition in the trade is sharp, and profits are brought down to a small margin, but the many stove foundries throughout the country claim a healthy state of affairs.

## STAGE DECORATION.

BY ALFRED TRUMBLE.

IT is not so many years ago that they cannot be counted on one's fingers that the last place in the world to look to for correct dramatic costume and decoration was the stage itself. You found it in books and pictures, but not in the theatre. The primitive conditions of Shakespeare's time were improved on, it is true. A sheet of canvas with the name of a locality painted on a board was no longer deemed sufficient for the illusion of the scene. But the new condition of affairs was not so much better for all that.

The traditional Roman street still looked like an avenue in modern Paris; the center door chamber which served as the widow Swandown's parlor also did duty for the apartment in historic Westminster, where Richard the crookback received the Lord Mayor and played his little farce for a crown. Indeed, Richard slept and dreamed his awful dream on the same uncomprehensively unmistakable sofa on which Major Wellington de Boots paid court to his charming neighbor, and which next night would, as like as not, figure as the couch on which the player king is done to death, or the bier on which Juliet reposes in her tomb. The same scene served for Caesar's palace and a modern ballroom; the same rustic interior provided Friar Lawrence with a cell and Claude Melnotte with a cottage. The costuming of Hamlet and of Richelieu was almost identical, and the same dresses served to set forth the wild picturesqueness of lawless Macbeth, and to give its local color to "The Robbers." The best theatres in the country usually kept up a simple stock of scenery and a simple wardrobe which were judged sufficient for any play that might be mounted, probably on the principle that anything was good enough as long as it was different from what the audience was accustomed to in its daily life.

Charles Fechter gave the American theatre its first approach to consistent and complete decoration. He was an artist at heart and his performances were set in scenic splendor after his own designs as well as his own heart. But the really permanent impetus given to the setting of the stage came from Edwin Booth. When Mr. Booth built the theatre which bore his name till it was turned into a dry goods store, he made a long step in artistic advance of his brother managers. Animated by the examples of Macready and Kean in England, he gave us the first approximately

accurate settings any plays had enjoyed on our stage. The science of stage decoration has become a very exact one since his famous presentations of Macbeth and Richelieu. To day the pictures the stage present are among the art works of each season.

The decoration of the stage at our theatres to-day is really worthy of high praise. It may not be absolutely accurate, indeed it seldom is, but it is almost invariably artistic and picturesque. It matches the play which it enshrines sufficiently to aid most materially in giving it life. Such sets as one encounters at the Madison Square, at Wallack's, and Daly's Theatres, would have been deemed impossible of creation a generation ago.

Stage costuming has experienced a similar improvement. Like the scenery it may not always be accurate, but it is always passably correct. Trunk hose are no longer worn in eras when square cuts and knee breeches are required, nor doublets and trunks in place of togas and Roman shirts. With Frank Millet employed to design the costumes for their Roman pieces, McCullough and Barrett laid the foundation for a custom which will ultimately be universal with all players who respect their art. As it is, no play of any importance, whose costumes are at all archaic in character, is now presented without a careful preparation in the sumptuary line. The references on costume in our libraries are thoroughly ransacked, and portfolios of historical costume plates form a part of many a player's library who ten years ago would not have hesitated to make a toga of a piano cover or to play Othello in a dressing-gown and a smoking cap.

The result is that its mounting and accessories often save a poor play from absolute condemnation now, and give a weak one a certain lease of life. We see the latter case illustrated in such dramas as, "The Artist's Daughter," recently presented here, and the latter in "The World," "Taken From Life," and a score of kindred productions, which deprived of their setting, would have been the flattest of failures. In the case of Henry Irving's plays at least, the costuming and mounting is about as near the true thing as it is ever likely to be made upon the stage. Indeed, no little of his phenomenal success is due to his cultivation of the correct and appropriate in the presentation of his pieces. Without the mounting that he gives them, even his undeniable, if eccentric, talent would not win the recognition it does. The scenery and costuming of "Twelfth Night," the London press almost unanimously declares, alone saved it from absolute failure on its recent production there.

The hand of reform has not yet reached the drop curtain. It is, as a rule, still the same huge, hideous, and time dishonored area of paint and puerility. If it is not an impossible Italian landscape copied from some conventional print, it is an even more impossible drapery, looking no more like silk or satin or velvet than the landscape looks like nature. At the Madison Square Theatre the embroidered curtains set an excellent, though by no means unsurpassable, example, but thus far it has not been improved upon. Like the decoration of the auditorium itself, the drop curtain leaves much to be wished for, but our ideal will doubtless be realized in due time. The day may never arrive when our Meissonniers and Geromes will put their brushes to canvas in the interest of the act drop, but it certainly will come when, as in the German theatres, the talent of a competent artist will be called upon to render the curtain appropriate in character and interesting to look at, as well as useful in shielding the industrious and profane stage carpenter from public view.

HOME made rag rugs are becoming popular. They are made by drawing rags through a body of coarse canvas, and clipping to an even surface when the body is covered. The most delightful harmonies of color are possible in these modest contrivances, as anyone who has ever been in the best room of a Maine farm house will testify. A rag rug, backed with stout canvas and well sewed at the edges, will last as nearly forever as most works of human hands, and will grow more agreeable to the eye with age.

MAHOGANY is now said to be fashionable for cabinet work. It is a striking satire on the hollowness of fashion that one of the finest woods which ever grew has got to have the endorsement of style to be put to its legitimate use.

